

In addition, claim 1 has been amended to recite that it relates to a method of marking a skin for a vehicle interior trim panel to indicate the position or function of a switch. Support can be found at page 15, , lines 12-19, which recite that indicia in the form of letters, numbers or symbols may be printed on the skin layer to indicate to the vehicle occupants the position and/or function of each switch. In addition, claim 1 has been amended to recite providing a substrate layer, a foam layer bonded directly to the substrate layer, and providing one or more switches embedded in said foam layer underlying the colored skin. Support can be found page 8 lines 13-23 which recite that the trim panel comprises a substrate layer, a foam layer and a skin layer and a switch 30. In addition, attention is directed to page 11, lines 22 to page 12, line 2. Furthermore, claim 1 has been amended to recite that the skin is formed by casting, spray coating, blow molding or thermoforming. Support can be found at page 13, lines 12-14. Finally, claim 1 has been amended to recite the use of a laser and projecting the laser to the outer skin in an area that overlies the one or more switches, and attention is again directed to page 15, lines 12-19. Accordingly, no new matter has been entered and the amendments are all fully supported by the specification.

The Examiner further rejected claim 1 for the following reasons: (1) under 35 USC 102(b) as being anticipated by EP 0771695; (2) under 35 USC 103(a) as being obvious over EP 0771695 in view of Spanjer (United States Patent No. 4,654,290), and (3) under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over Spanjer ('290) in view of EP 0771695.

Applicants' invention is directed at the use of a laser to change the color of a portion of the outer surface of a skin layer for a vehicle interior trim panel to indicate the position or function of a switch located beneath the skin. The portion of the skin which is caused to change color by the laser beam may be an indicia in the form of letters, numbers or symbols. Again, page 15, lines 12-19 of the Specification provides support for this description.

Turning to the cited art, EP 0771695 is directed at a dashboard having a foil (3) which covers a support (2) and a flap (5) which covers an opening for the emergence of an air bag. The

peripheral edge of the flap is marked on the surface of the foil by a laser which marks "a weakening or perforation covered by a laser-treated track (7)". (See the English translation of claim 1.) The laser treated track is said to have a different color from the foil.

Therefore, the laser treated track (7) defines and identifies a perforated line on the foil which indicates the peripheral edge of the flap. The reference does not disclose, teach or suggest a method of marking a skin with a laser to indicate the position or function of a switch located beneath the skin in that area. Furthermore, the fact is that EP 0 771 695 teaches that the laser serves to significantly weaken, and in that sense, one skilled in the art would not conclude that it could ever be relied upon in a manner to indicate the position or function of a switch where in the skin may be flexed repeatedly between on and off positions.

Turning to Spanjer (United States Patent No. 4,654,290), this reference is directed at a device for marking by radiation a covering means, or encapsulation means, comprising a compound formed from a plastic resin and a coloring material wherein said coloring material comprises titanium dioxide in the range of 1%-5% by weight. The field of the invention includes markable plastic encapsulation for electronic devices and improved laser marked electronic devices, say with an identifying series of numbers.

This reference does not teach or suggest a method of marking a skin, formed by casting, spray coating, blow molding or thermoforming, with a laser, to indicate the position or function of a switch located beneath the skin, on a vehicle interior trim panel. See again, amended claim 1. At best, the reference simply refers to marking an electronic device encapsulated with plastic.

Accordingly, the two cited references, EP 0771695 and United States Patent No. 4,654,290, separately or in combination do not teach or suggest a method of marking a skin with a laser to indicate the position or function of a switch located beneath the skin for a vehicle interior trim panel, the skin formed by casting, spray coating, blow molding or thermoforming, wherein the panel comprises a substrate, foam layer, and said skin layer.

Regarding the objection to the phraseology in the Abstract, it has been corrected and a

new Abstract is included herein. Specifically, as suggested by the Examiner, the word "comprising" has been replaced with the word --including--.

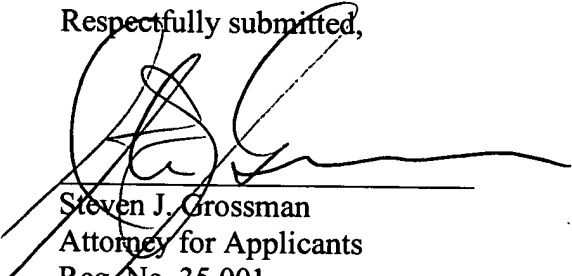
Attached is a copy of the Amended Claim Showing Changes Made.

In consideration of the Amendments to the claims and the remarks hereinabove, Applicants respectfully submit that all of the objections and rejections raised by the Office Action mailed April 3, 2003, have been overcome by the response. Accordingly, all claims currently pending in the application are believed to be in condition for allowance. Allowance at an early date is respectfully solicited.

In the event the Examiner deems personal contact is necessary, please contact the undersigned attorney at (603) 668-6560.

In the event there are any further deficiencies or additional fees are payable, please charge them (or credit any overpayment) to our Deposit Account No 50-2121.

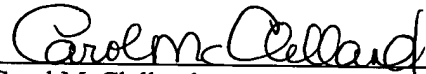
Respectfully submitted,



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CERTIFICATE OF MAILING

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service First Class Mail in an envelope addressed to: Mail Stop Non-Fee Amendment, Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450 on July 3, 2003 at Manchester, New Hampshire.



Carol McClelland

Marked Up Claim Showing Changes

1. (Amended) A method of marking a skin for a vehicle interior trim panel to indicate the position or function of a switch comprising the steps of:

providing a skin formed by casting, spray coating, blow molding or thermoforming [with] having a color, said colored skin having [and] an outer skin layer surface;

providing a substrate layer;

providing a foam layer bonded directly to said substrate layer and to said colored skin;

providing one or more switches embedded in said foam layer and underlying said colored skin;

activating [applying] a laser, said laser emitting a laser beam;

projecting said laser beam on to said outer skin surface in an area that overlies said one or more switches such that a portion of the skin surface contacted by said laser beam changes color relative to a portion of said outer skin surface not contacted by said laser to create a marking [in the outer skin surface indicating the presence of a vehicle component or function].